

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 17, 2005

The Honorable Duncan Hunter, Chairman  
Armed Services Committee  
2120 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your leadership on the House Armed Services Committee. As you continue work on the fiscal year 2006 Defense Authorization bill, we urge the Committee to include the following priorities: ending the Disabled Veteran's Tax and the Military Families Tax, ensuring an adequate number of troops and adequate equipment for our troops, improving military pay for senior enlisted personnel, expanding TRICARE to all members of the Guard and Reserve, and ensuring fair and equitable recruitment incentives and bonuses for the Guard and Reserve.

As you know, the Disabled Veterans' Tax forces disabled military retirees to give up one dollar of their pension for every dollar of disability pay they receive. Two years ago a partial solution to this unfair tax was enacted, but it takes ten years to eliminate the tax while requiring two-thirds of military retirees with service-connected disabilities to continue to pay it. We support ending this unfair tax for all of the nearly 400,000 military retirees who continue to pay it.

Another unfair tax that must end is the Military Families Tax (SBP/DIC offset) which penalizes survivors, mostly widows of those killed as a result of combat from injuries sustained in service. These widows lose their survivor benefits if they receive Dependency and Indemnity Compensation benefits because their spouse has died of a service-connected injury. We must end the Military Families Tax for the 53,000 spouses who continue to pay this unfair tax, which affects families that have made the greatest sacrifice for our country.

We also support strengthening our support for our men and women in uniform. Unfortunately, our troops are stretched too thin and are not adequately equipped. Currently, over 280,000 U.S. service men and women are deployed, with one-half in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Nearly 70,000 have been called up more than once. Chronic shortages in personal protective gear and armored vehicles have made our troops less secure. Last year, there was an increase in the number of troops for the Army and Marines, and supplemental funds for force protection measures, such as additional body armor and armored Humvees. We support building on the success in increasing troop strength and getting better equipment for those called to duty. Raising end-strength would reduce the strain on the National Guard and Reserve and improve recruitment and retention by reducing extended deployments.

Key to military retention and improved readiness is the restoration of targeted pay raises for mid-grade to senior Non-Commissioned Officers that began in FY 2003, which the Bush Administration dropped from the fiscal year 2005 budget. These pay raises are needed to retain

the critical, senior enlisted personnel (sergeants in senior grades) who are most involved in the fighting.

We must also do more to improve benefits for our National Guard and Reservists. Despite the fact that more than 1.1 million members of the National Guard and Reserves have been called up for active duty over the last two and one-half years, not all members have full access to TRICARE. According to the Government Accountability Office, 20 percent of all reservists do not have health insurance, and 40 percent of reservists aged 19 to 35 lack health coverage. Last year, Congress gave National Guard and Reserve personnel and their families permanent TRICARE 120 days after being deactivated. We also succeeded in providing one year of TRICARE benefits for every 90 days of service, after being called up, for personnel who agree to serve in the selected reserve and pay a low fee. We must build on this success and provide full access to TRICARE to all members of the Guard and Reserve and their families for a low fee.

We must also ensure that recruitment and retention incentives and bonuses for Reserve components are fair, and equitable in comparison with incentives and bonuses for active duty components. We support raising the enlistment bonus cap by \$30,000 to attract new recruits to the reserves, offering a \$2,500 referral bonus to current reserve members who refer a qualified prospect for the reserves, and removing current limits on consecutive bonuses, and offering two to six year enlistment options with appropriate bonuses.

Our men and women in uniform both past and present have served our nation with distinction, and now it is time for a grateful nation to honor that service. Thank you for your consideration of these requests. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our troops and our veterans receive the benefits they have earned and that they deserve.

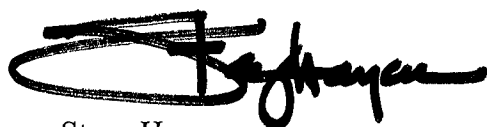
Sincerely,




Darlene Hooley  
Member of Congress



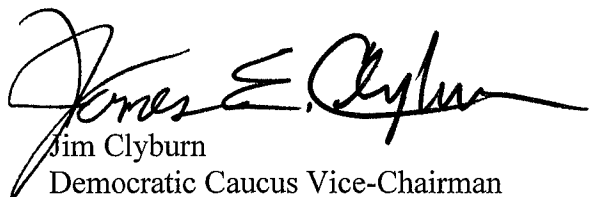
Nancy Pelosi  
Democratic Leader




Steny Hoyer  
Democratic Whip



Robert Menendez  
Democratic Caucus Chairman




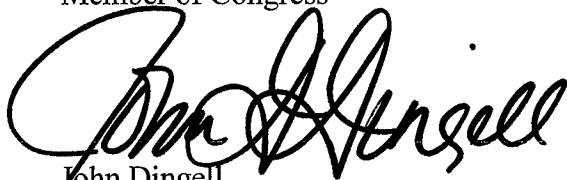
Jim Clyburn  
Democratic Caucus Vice-Chairman




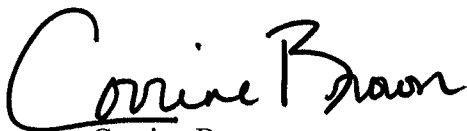
Rahm Emanuel  
Member of Congress


  
George Miller  
Member of Congress

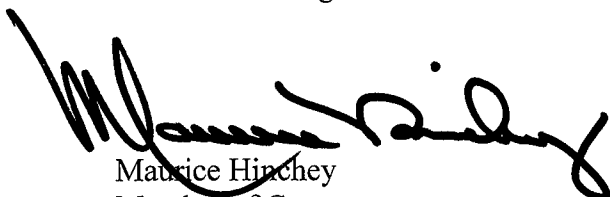
  
Lane Evans  
Member of Congress

  
John Dingell  
Member of Congress

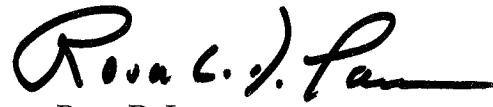
  
Earl Blumenauer  
Member of Congress

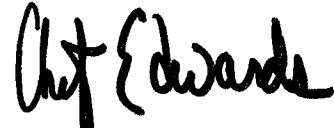
  
Corrine Brown  
Member of Congress

  
Norm Dicks  
Member of Congress

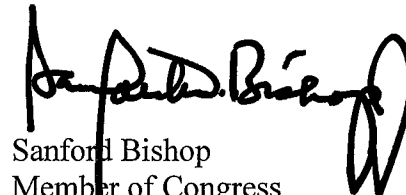
  
Matrice Hinchey  
Member of Congress


  
Tim Holden  
Member of Congress

  
Rosa DeLauro  
Member of Congress

  
Chet Edwards  
Member of Congress

  
Charles Rangel  
Member of Congress

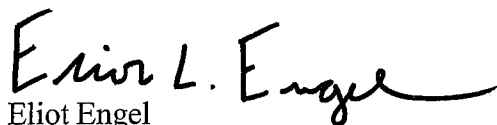
  
Sanford Bishop  
Member of Congress

  
William Delahunt  
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Bob Filner  
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Ruben Hinojosa  
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Sheila Jackson Lee  
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Eliot Engel  
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William Jefferson  
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Dale Kildee  
Member of Congress



Edward Markey  
Member of Congress



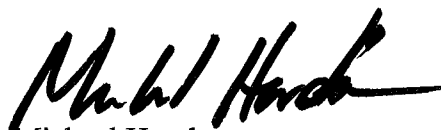
Eleanor Holmes Norton  
Member of Congress



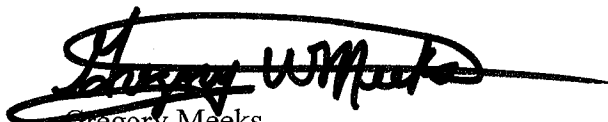
Collin Peterson  
Member of Congress



Lois Capps  
Member of Congress



Michael Honda  
Member of Congress



Gregory Meeks  
Member of Congress



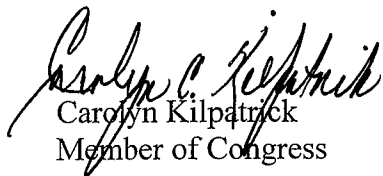
Dennis Moore  
Member of Congress



Hilda Solis  
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Emanuel Cleaver, II  
Member of Congress



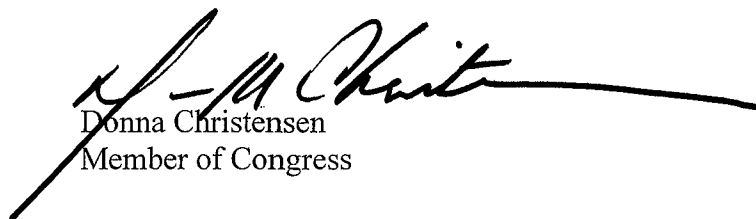
Carolyn Kilpatrick  
Member of Congress



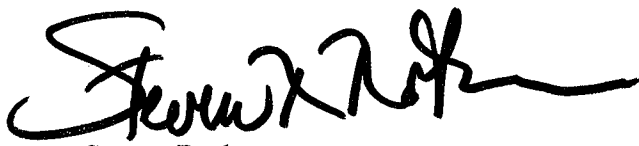
C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger  
Member of Congress



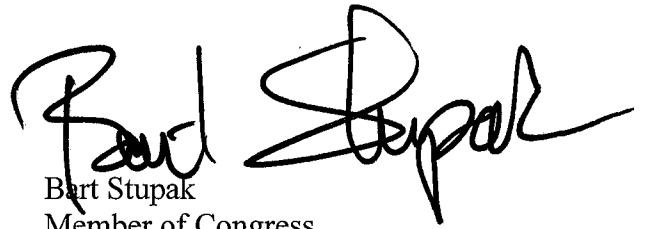
Ben Chandler  
Member of Congress



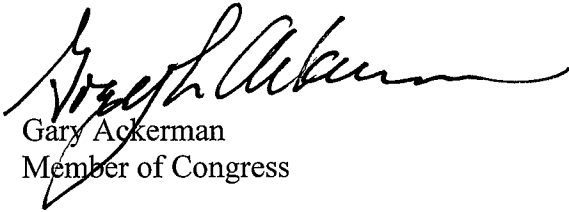
Donna Christensen  
Member of Congress



Steven Rothman  
Member of Congress



Bart Stupak  
Member of Congress



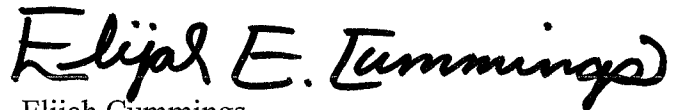
Gary Ackerman  
Member of Congress



Ben Cardin  
Member of Congress



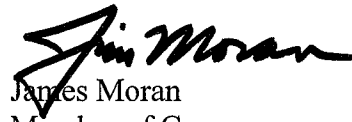
Jerry Costello  
Member of Congress



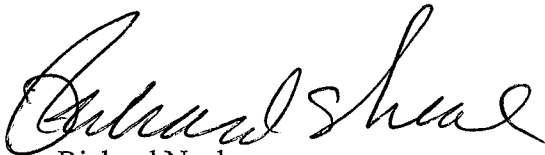
Elijah Cummings  
Member of Congress



Barney Frank  
Member of Congress



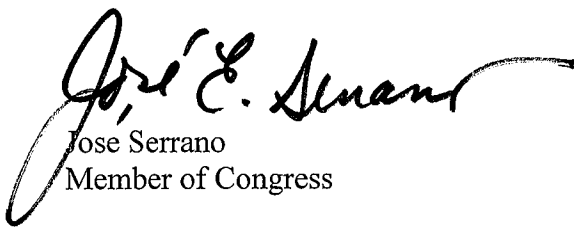
James Moran  
Member of Congress



Richard Neal  
Member of Congress



Donald Payne  
Member of Congress



Jose Serrano  
Member of Congress



Edolphus Towns  
Member of Congress



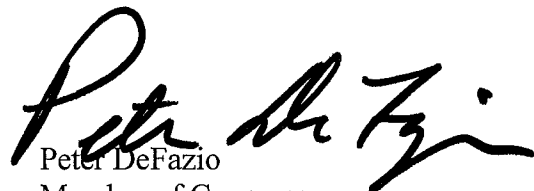
Peter Visclosky  
Member of Congress



Henry Waxman  
Member of Congress



Lynn Woolsey  
Member of Congress



Peter DeFazio  
Member of Congress



Tom Lantos  
Member of Congress



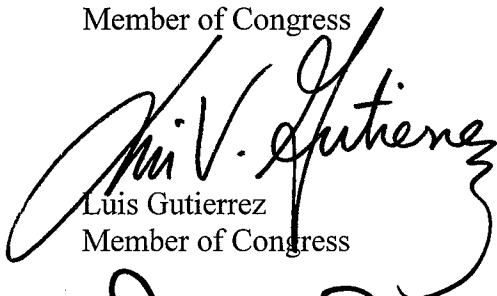
Silvestre Reyes  
Member of Congress



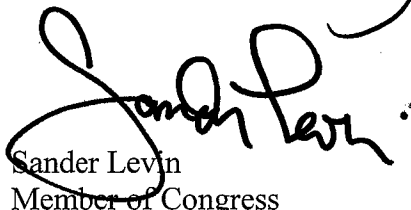
Marion Berry  
Member of Congress



Bart Gordon  
Member of Congress



Luis Gutierrez  
Member of Congress



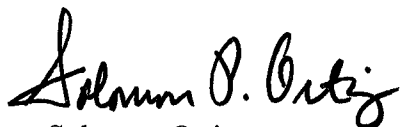
Sander Levin  
Member of Congress



Carolyn Maloney  
Member of Congress



James Oberstar  
Member of Congress



Solomon Ortiz  
Member of Congress



Louise Slaughter  
Member of Congress



Sherrod Brown  
Member of Congress



Gene Green  
Member of Congress



Marcy Kaptur  
Member of Congress



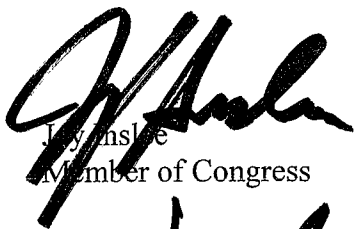
Nita Lowey  
Member of Congress



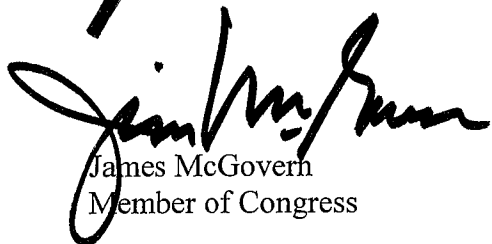
Doris Matsui  
Member of Congress



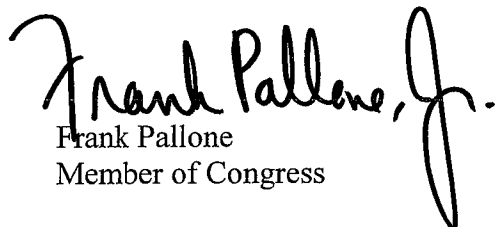
Major Owens  
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee  
Member of Congress



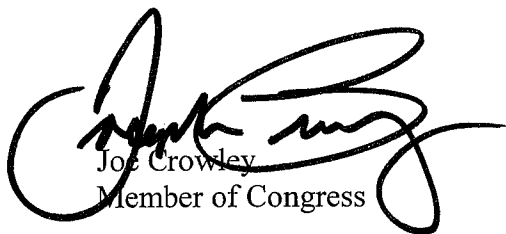
James McGovern  
Member of Congress



Frank Pallone, Jr.  
Frank Pallone  
Member of Congress



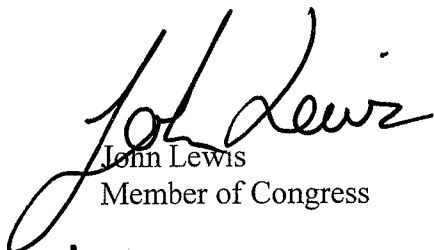
David Scott  
David Scott  
Member of Congress



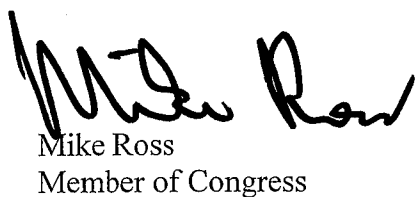
Joe Crowley  
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Charles Gonzalez  
Member of Congress



John Lewis  
Member of Congress



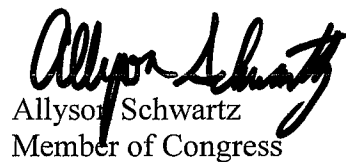
Mike Ross  
Member of Congress



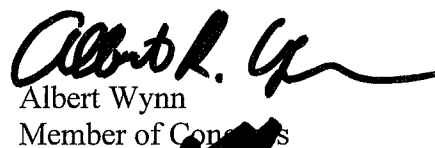
Patrick Kennedy  
Member of Congress



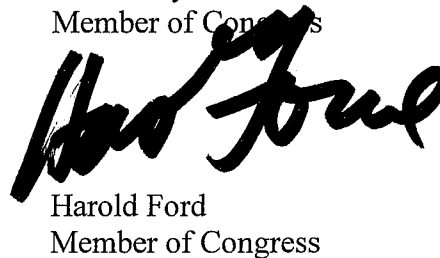
Michael Michaud  
Member of Congress



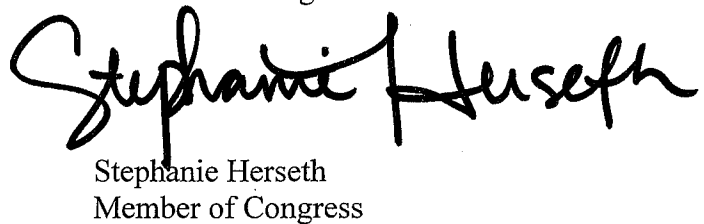
Allyson Schwartz  
Member of Congress



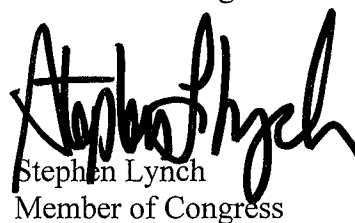
Albert Wynn  
Member of Congress



Harold Ford  
Member of Congress



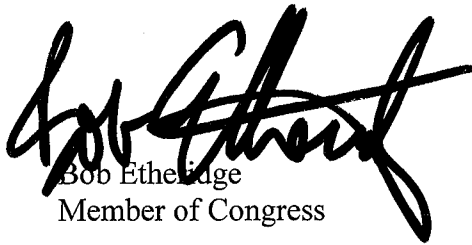
Stephanie Herseth  
Member of Congress



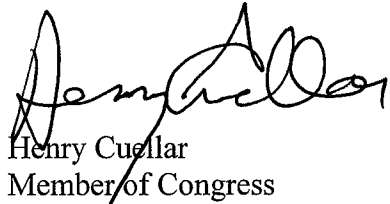
Stephen Lynch  
Member of Congress



Adam Schiff  
Member of Congress



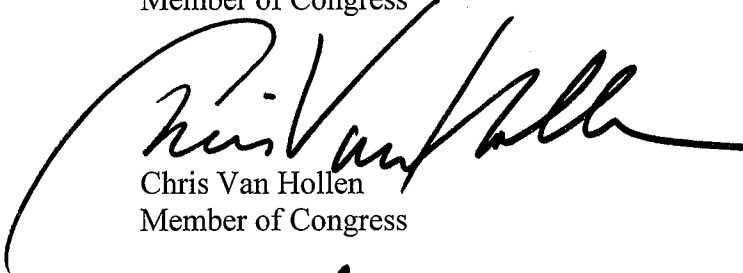
Bob Etheridge  
Member of Congress



Henry Cuellar  
Member of Congress



Ron Kind  
Member of Congress



Chris Van Hollen  
Member of Congress



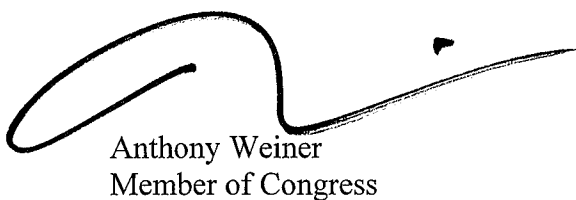
Russ Carnahan  
Member of Congress



Daniel Lipinski  
Member of Congress



Tom Allen  
Member of Congress



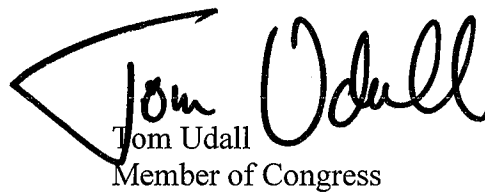
Anthony Weiner  
Member of Congress



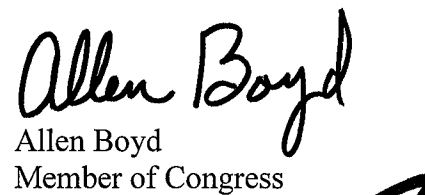
Leonard Boswell  
Member of Congress



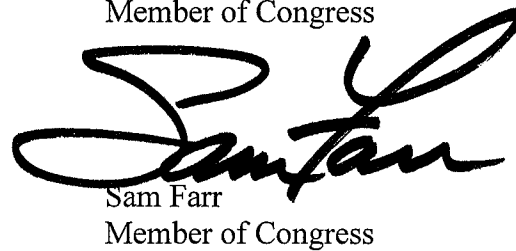
Raul Grijalva  
Member of Congress



Tom Udall  
Member of Congress



Allen Boyd  
Member of Congress



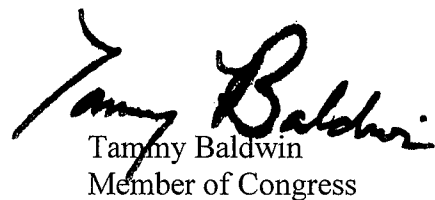
Sam Farr  
Member of Congress



Robert Scott  
Member of Congress

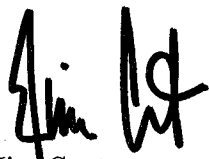


Tim Bishop  
Member of Congress



Tammy Baldwin  
Member of Congress

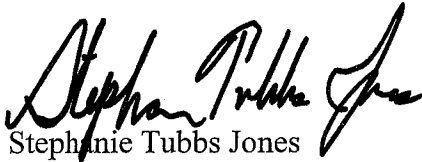




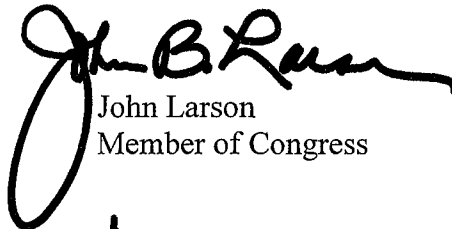
Jim Costa  
Member of Congress



Rush Holt  
Member of Congress



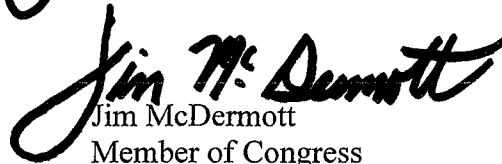
Stephanie Tubbs Jones  
Member of Congress



John Larson  
Member of Congress



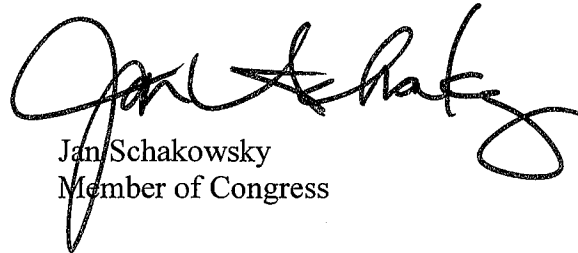
Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



Jim McDermott  
Member of Congress



Linda Sanchez  
Member of Congress



Jan Schakowsky  
Member of Congress



Brad Sherman  
Member of Congress



Shelley Berkley  
Member of Congress



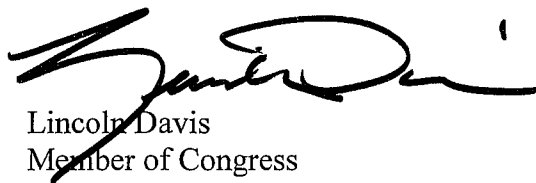
G.K. Butterfield  
Member of Congress



Dennis Cardoza  
Member of Congress



Jim Davis  
Member of Congress



Lincoln Davis  
Member of Congress



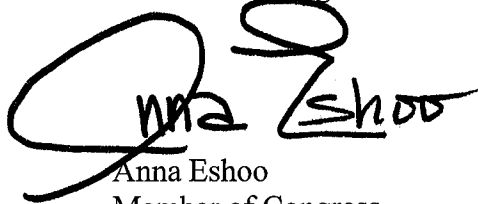
Michael Doyle  
Member of Congress



Brian Higgins  
Member of Congress



Ted Strickland  
Member of Congress



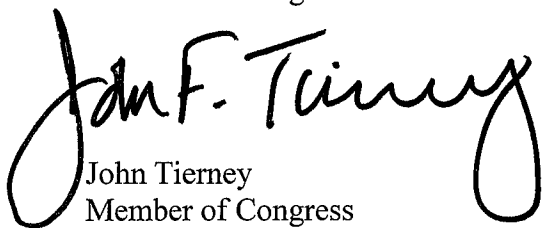
Anna Eshoo  
Member of Congress



Ed Case  
Member of Congress



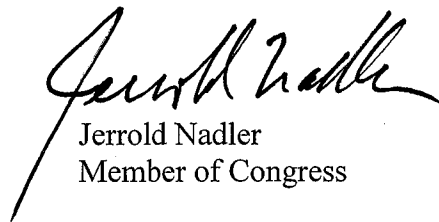
Zoe Lofgren  
Member of Congress



John Tierney  
Member of Congress



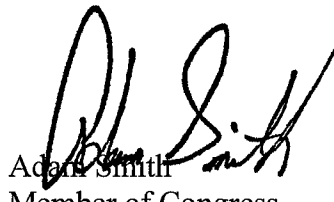
Howard Berman  
Member of Congress



Jerrold Nadler  
Member of Congress



John Barrow  
Member of Congress



Adam Smith  
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



Carolyn McCarthy  
Member of Congress



Diane Watson  
Member of Congress



Nick Rahall  
Member of Congress